

Even more effective than the anti-fusion laws in limiting Populist electoral success was one of the most hallowed of American electoral reforms, the Australian or secret ballot. Before this "reform," parties supplied ballots to the voters, who usually responded by voting the straight ticket. After the reform, with governmental units supplying the ballots, economy often demanded that a party win a certain percentage of the vote in a previous election before being placed on the ballot. If this was impossible, a petition had to be circulated. If the petition required ten percent of the voters, then it became both expensive and time-consuming, a real problem for poor farmers tied down by the daily chores on the farm. Even should any Populists be elected to a legislative body, they found that unless they controlled that body the political system gave them little power. In an era of strict party government, they found that they were ignored in debate, their bills never reached the floor, and they spent their hours attending meetings of the most obscure committees.

Argersinger makes a good case for his argument. His research is a model for historians. He uses a wide variety of sources and methods, from archival records to roll call analysis, and his thesis is important for Populist historiography and political science. There are, however, a few points about which I have some disagreements. I would have liked to have seen an even more systematic presentation of the restrictive laws. He dwells too much on Iowa and the Dakotas and does not include the "West" as promised in the title. More personally, I found him to be a real follower of the pure, "mid-road" Populist ideal. As a successful biographer of William Peffer, a leading mid-road Kansan, he seems to harbor the belief that if the Populists had not sold out to the opportunistic fusionists, they might have had a real impact on American society. This is difficult to imagine when one considers their very limited electoral success. They probably were lucky to have had the influence John D. Hicks claims for them, as the intellectual forebears of much of the regulatory legislation of the twentieth century, another system that didn't work too well.

Norwegian Yankee: Knute Nelson and the Failure of American Politics, 1860-1923, by Millard L. Gieske and Steven J. Keillor. Biographical Series. Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1995. xv, 426 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$30.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY BRUCE L. LARSON, MANKATO STATE UNIVERSITY

Norwegian Yankee is a full biography of Knute Nelson, an enduring Scandinavian-American politician in Minnesota. The subtitle's refer-

ence to the "failure" of American politics may be a bit misleading at first glance; it refers to the national scene, not to Nelson. Indeed, he was the first Scandinavian elected as a U.S. congressman (1883–1889), Minnesota governor (1893–1895), and U.S. senator (1895–1923). His success started a strong tradition of Scandinavians in Minnesota politics (beginning with his election in 1892, 21 of the last 25 governors have been Scandinavians), and he symbolized the American dream for Scandinavian immigrants. Nonetheless, authors Millard Gieske, a political scientist, and historian Steven Keillor, who completed this work after Gieske's death, argue convincingly that Nelson emphasized instead his role as a traditional Republican, or "Norwegian Yankee."

Born near Voss, Norway, Nelson emigrated as a boy in 1849 with his mother, Ingeborg Johnson. They settled in Dane County, Wisconsin, where Knute took the name of his stepfather (son of Nils, Americanized as "Nels"). He attended common schools, served in the Civil War, and graduated from Albion Academy. He fought with Wisconsin's Fourth Regiment—not Hans Christian Heg's well-known Fifteenth "Norwegian" Regiment—which strengthened his American patriotism and influenced his switch from Douglas Democrat to Lincoln Republican. He passed the bar examination in 1867 and was a practicing lawyer/farmer. In 1871 he moved to Alexandria, Minnesota, and served as county attorney and state senator. As a University of Minnesota regent, he helped establish the first professorship in Scandinavian studies.

Nelson was in general a solid Republican, yet on such issues as farm grievances and tariffs he supported moderate reform. He understood the need for frontier business expansion, such as railroads, and he legally represented Jim Hill. But as governor he also supported farm drainage for rural pioneers, organized the relief effort after the 1894 Hinckley fire, where he "spoke in Norwegian" to victims (197), and favored limited regulation of railroads. He opposed the more extreme Populist and Nonpartisan League positions on government. In the U.S. Senate he supported Taft rather than Theodore Roosevelt and the Republican insurgents in 1912, yet he earlier had opposed the Payne-Aldrich tariff. In 1916 he was the only Minnesotan in Congress to vote to table the Gore-McLemore resolutions, a firm stand against Germany, but he voted for war in 1917. Independent, honest, politically wise yet cautious, and personally modest, Nelson never lost an election; he died in office in 1923.

Iowans will relate to Nelson's Norwegian heritage, his farm orientation, and his standing as a Scandinavian politician. In the Nelson Papers, for example, one can find a substantial number of letters to

"Uncle Knute" from Iowa and surrounding midwestern states, including many in the Norwegian language.

Norwegian Yankee will become a principal source on Nelson, replacing Martin Odland's earlier study (1926) and Erling Rolfsrud's brief journalistic account (1986). Gieske and Keillor have produced a well-researched and very readable book about an important political figure in the Populist-Progressive era.

Cultivating Cooperation: A History of the Missouri Farmers Association, by Raymond A. Young. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995. xiv, 246 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendixes, index. \$25.00 cloth, \$11.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY KIMBERLY K. PORTER, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

In *Cultivating Cooperation*, Raymond A. Young traces the history of the Missouri Farmers Association (MFA) "from behind the mule to modern times" (x). Along the way, he presents an insider's view of the organization founded in the spring of 1914 "to promote and improve the economic and social position of farmers, to raise the plane of farm living to a higher level, [and] to enhance the economic, social, educational and religious opportunities of farmers and their families" (186).

Young's story of cooperative buying and selling, community creameries, poultry processing plants, soy oil extraction facilities, feed and flour mills, cement production, and oil distribution is a detailed one—rich in dates, locations, financial data, and leadership. His narrative is primarily a chronicle, and the argument that links the MFA's successes is an implicit one.

According to Young, the business-oriented MFA developed from a constituency of farm clubs organized to provide entertainment, social experiences, and cooperative buying power. Only when they realized the need for "an institutional mechanism by which they could bring economic balance under their control" (10) did they solidify their confederation.

The economic motivations for organization are, in Young's account, implicitly intertwined with philosophical ones. The MFA has survived and prospered, according to Young, primarily due to the aspirations of its farmer-members. Its cooperators understand that only through continued and concentrated patronage can the benefits of united buying and selling be maintained. Democratic control ensures that the leadership of the organization will not stray too far from the rarely articulated but widely held goals and principles of the MFA.

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